

## CHAPTER 6 HISTORIC RESOURCES

This chapter includes an assessment of Sandy Springs' existing historic resources and current preservation planning efforts. The intent of this chapter is to identify the significant historic buildings and places within the city limits of Sandy Springs with the purpose of encouraging further preservation or adaptive reuse of these resources. Recommendations for future preservation and planning activities will be a significant part of the public participation component of this plan.

The namesake of Sandy Springs is the existing natural springs located in the block bounded by Roswell Road, Hilderbrand Road, Sandy Springs Circle, and Sandy Springs Place. The center of the historical agricultural community of Sandy Springs was the area bounded generally by Roswell Road on the east, Abernathy Road on the north, and Mt. Vernon on the south. However, today no significant concentration of historic resources survives in this area. The historic development of Sandy Springs was of a naturally dispersed farming community. The historic lack of a recognizable downtown or city center makes the preservation of existing historic resources more challenging today, simply because the resources are generally isolated from one another with few exceptions. However, Sandy Springs does have significant historic resources that are worthy of recognition and preservation.

### HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF SANDY SPRINGS

This overview largely follows the community history provided by *Fulton County Historic Resources Survey: North Fulton County and Sandy Springs* (Kip Wright/Historic Resources Assessments, 1996), and the information provided by Heritage Sandy Springs at <http://www.heritagesandysprings.org/history/timeline.html>.

#### Sandy Springs

Sandy Springs is named for natural springs located near the present-day intersection of Mount Vernon and Roswell Roads. These roads were at one time Indian trails, and their intersection is believed to have been an important crossroads. The springs served Native Americans and travelers as a site for rest and refreshment on the way to and from Atlanta and Decatur.

The first settlers moved to the area from other sections of Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Some lottery winners never settled, while others settled for awhile and then left. As a result, those who settled were able to purchase additional land. In the 1830s, a building located near the intersection of Glenridge Drive and Johnson Ferry Road served as a traveler's rest stop and circuit courthouse; the building remains today and is known as The Wagon Stop House.

In 1842, Wilson Spruill bought the land where the springs were located from another lottery winner and donated part of the land for a Methodist Church (now the Sandy Springs Methodist Church).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sandy Springs developed as a small crossroads in the center of a sparsely settled agricultural community. Farmers grew cotton, corn and beans for the market. The founders of the community established a Methodist Church under a brush arbor near the springs in 1848. The church also operated a campground until 1960. Both the church

and the campground served as an important social institution to the area. A one-room log building was constructed in 1851 across the road from the church. It burned in 1897 and was replaced by a two-story, four-room Hammond School, which is no longer standing.

During the 1860s, James Isom operated Isom Ferry, which crossed the Chattahoochee at the mouth of Sope Creek. John Heard took over operation in 1868 and renamed the ferry “Heards Ferry” which operated until 1890.

Sandy Springs historically did not have large commercial centers or industries. Community activities were centered on churches, schools, and stores. In the 1920s, commercial development grew at the intersection of Roswell Road and Mt. Vernon. The nucleus of the commercial center was comprised of the Burdett grocery store, which operated from 1924-1974, a drug store and a ball park.

### **Pole Town**

Pole Town was a small farming community located along Belle Isle Drive and Roswell Road in Sandy Springs. Many of the residents sold their produce at the Municipal Market in Atlanta and around the Market’s vicinity. Mack Dobbins’ wagon yard became a stopping place for farmers traveling to and from Atlanta. The wagon yard’s corral, built out of logs, gave the area a rustic appearance and its name. Sentell Baptist Church and houses from the 1920s to the 1940s make up the community.

### **Dunwoody**

Parts of Dunwoody are located within the city limits of Sandy Springs; Dunwoody is defined as the area bound by GA 400 to the west, I-285 to the south, the Chattahoochee River to the north, and Gwinnett County to the east.

Dunwoody settled through the land lottery after the 1820s and became a sparsely settled rural farming community. Dunwoody is named after Charles Dunwoody of Roswell. He purchased Land Lot 377 in 1862 for his farm. The churches and the crossroads at Mt. Vernon Road, Nandina Lane and Chamblee Dunwoody Road served as the focus of the community. In 1881, Dunwoody became one of the stops of the Roswell Railroad that operated between Chamblee and Roswell Station from 1881 to 1921. The railroad spurred significant commercial and industrial development at the crossroads of the three roads.

### **Twentieth Century Development**

Beginning in the 1920s, Sandy Springs and Dunwoody became a popular area for the summer homes of vacationing Atlantans. The rolling forested hills and Chattahoochee River provided a suitable respite from the heat for city dwellers. Several prominent Atlantans built houses, ranging from log cabins to large homes, in the area. The T.K. Glen family built Glenridge Hall during this period, and Asa Candler had a log summer home, which no longer stands, near Burdett Road and Lake Forrest Road.

After World War II, the character of Sandy Springs and Dunwoody started changing. In the 1950s, the population started growing, leading to increased commercial and residential development. Mt. Vernon Woods, one of the first subdivisions, was laid out in 1953. In 1955, the first shopping center was built along Roswell Road. With the opening of Interstate 285 and GA-

400 in the 1960s and 1970s, office parks, apartments and additional commercial development followed. With the new growth and development, many of the farms, farmhouses and weekend retreats were lost. In one generation, the character of these two communities changed from rural to suburban.

Growth continued into the 1960s. In 1967, the last covered bridge in the area over Sope Creek at Paper Mill Road was destroyed by fire. In 1968 a group of local residents and county representatives formed the Community Planning Council. Comprehensive development plans for the area were drafted, but most were ineffective. The Sandy Springs Historic Community Foundation was an outgrowth of renewed efforts in the 1980s to beautify and preserve Sandy Springs' historic resources.

### **PROPERTIES LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

There is only one National Register-listed property within the city limits of Sandy Springs. Glenridge Hall, located at 6615 Glenridge Drive, was listed on the National Register in 1982 and is currently a private home. The 1920s Tudor-style home is nestled in the midst of 47 acres of woods, and the site is available for rental by private parties.

The National Register of Historic Places is our nation's official list of historic places deemed worthy of preservation. The National Register of Historic Places plays the central role in recognizing buildings, sites, districts, structures and objects significant in national, state or local history, archeology, architecture, engineering or culture. Listing in the National Register does not guarantee full protection from demolition, but any development project using federal money or requiring a federal permit must undergo "Section 106" review, required by the Historic Preservation Act, to consider the impact the project might have on nearby sites that are on or eligible for the National Register. Nominations to the National Register are submitted to and approved by the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, but the vast majority of the buildings on the list are privately owned.

### **LOCAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE / LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

Currently, there is no adopted local historic preservation ordinance in Sandy Springs. This type of ordinance provides some means of local protection to historic resources through the legal establishment of a Historic Preservation Commission and/or local historic district. There is also no existing local historic district currently established within the city limits of Sandy Springs.

The adoption of a historic preservation ordinance could be a significant component of a local historic preservation program in Sandy Springs. This type of local ordinance would provide the community with potential funding sources to introduce various preservation planning programs, as well as provide local options for regulating uses of historic properties.

Once a city adopts a historic preservation ordinance, the locality can designate local historic districts or individual local historic landmarks with the goal of retaining the character of the building or area. To receive local designation, a building or district must be historically, architecturally or culturally significant and retain most of its character. The goal of local designation is to preserve the unique character of a property or group of properties (district), while allowing new construction to include architectural designs that are compatible with the neighboring historic buildings and their surroundings.

A Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) can also be established once a local historic preservation ordinance is adopted. An HPC reviews and comments on potential building projects and local actions that would affect designated historic buildings. Owners of designated properties typically cannot demolish, move or change exterior features of the structure without approval from the HPC, as provided under the local ordinance. The local preservation process in Georgia is governed by the Georgia Historic Preservation Act of 1980, which is the enabling legislation that allows local communities to adopt a historic preservation ordinance and establish a preservation commission.

## **LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING HISTORIC PRESERVATION INITIATIVES**

There are two community groups that are involved in the preservation of, or education regarding Sandy Springs' heritage and historic properties.

Heritage Sandy Springs is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the community history of Sandy Springs. The organization, established in 1985 and formerly known as the Sandy Springs Historic Community Foundation, offers educational programs with the purpose of promoting community identity and pride. Heritage Sandy Springs operates the Sandy Springs Historic Site, located at 6075 Sandy Springs Circle, which consists of a 4-acre park containing the community's historic "sandy springs" and the Williams-Payne House Museum and Gardens. The Williams-Payne house is a circa 1869 farmhouse moved to the site from the Williams Farm once located on Mount Vernon Road; the home provides the focal point of educational programs about daily life in Sandy Springs during the period from 1870 to 1920. Heritage Sandy Springs also sponsors community events such as lectures, concerts, festivals and other community-building activities.

The Sandy Springs Society, incorporated in 1988, is the largest single philanthropic agency in Sandy Springs. The society is a membership organization of volunteers who raise funds for organizations that support programs in certain identified areas of community need. One of the identified needs established by the society is Heritage Preservation.

## **SANDY SPRINGS HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY**

A historic resource survey was conducted for North Fulton County and Sandy Springs in 1996 by Elliott Kipling Wright of Historic Resource Assessments and by the Fulton County. The purpose of the survey was to uniformly document buildings, sites, and structures of historical, architectural, and cultural significance in the City of Sandy Springs. The survey consisted of historic research, field surveys, and a survey report. The methodology developed by the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Department of Natural Resources and described in the Georgia Historic Resources Survey Manual was followed in the survey to ensure consistency within the county and with surveys conducted throughout the state. The survey was funded by Fulton County and the Georgia State Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Department of Natural Resources.

The land area surveyed in Sandy Springs included 24,710 acres. A total of 161 sites were surveyed in the City of Sandy Springs using the Georgia Historic Resources survey forms. A survey form for each property surveyed, as well as a survey report with pertinent analysis of the survey data, is located at the Georgia State Historic Preservation Division (HPD) office in Atlanta and at the local office of Heritage Sandy Springs.

Property types surveyed included single and multiple dwellings, summer cottages/hunting lodges, transportation-related bridges and structures, churches, and a school. However, the majority (88 percent) of the historic resources identified were single-family homes. The most common type of residential property identified in Sandy Springs was the suburban home constructed between 1920 and 1949. Many of these suburban homes are good examples of the Bungalow and Side Gabled Cottage house types. House type refers to the overall form of the house and the general layout of the interior rooms of the original part of the house.

A majority of the residential buildings surveyed feature an academic architectural style; style refers to the ornamentation and decoration of a house. The three most common architectural styles found in Sandy Springs include English Vernacular Revival, Colonial Revival, and Craftsman. However, there are many historic homes in Sandy Springs that feature no strict architectural style at all; these buildings are usually referred to as “vernacular.”

There were eighteen properties identified as second homes, summer cottages or hunting lodges. Several were located along bluffs overlooking the Chattahoochee River, which made them ideal as summer retreats for Atlantans. These homes were constructed as second homes, such as the Chastain-Bourne House (Fu-SS-34) and the Dr. Dan H. Griffin House (Fu-SS-60), Mitchell-Tiller House (Fu-SS-58), but all later became primary residences. Nine of the identified properties were log houses.

Although the dates of construction of the surveyed properties range from the early 1800s to the 1950s, the large majority of buildings in Sandy Springs were constructed between 1910 and 1949. At the time of the survey, most of the resources (82 percent) were considered to be in fair to good condition. However, it is unknown how many of the surveyed resources have been demolished since 1996 to make way for new development, redevelopment, or road projects.

Finally, approximately 30 percent of the resources surveyed were determined to be eligible or potentially eligible for the listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Commercial, Industrial and Institutional Resources**

No historic commercial or industrial resources are known to exist within the City of Sandy Springs. The only historic institutional building that has been identified is the Liberty-Guinn Consolidated School (now the Archbishop Thomas A. Donnellan School) that dates from Twentieth Century.

### **Rural Resources**

Although Sandy Springs was once an agricultural community with abundant farmland and vernacular farmhouses, none of this rural character remains today other than through the survival of isolated homesteads or farmhouses. The rural character of the landscape has completely transformed into urban and suburban development.

### **Transportation Resources**

The historic significance of the Chattahoochee River and early roadways in the development of Sandy Springs is worthy of note. The intersection of Mount Vernon and Roswell Roads provided two corridors for trade and transportation for the Sandy Springs community, while the river crossings (including ferries and covered bridges) provided access across the river that bounds Sandy Springs on the north and west. Unfortunately, none of the early historic ferries and

covered bridges across the Chattahoochee River has survived to the present day. However, there are several intact historic bridges, and one dam, located in Sandy Springs that date from the 1920s to the mid-twentieth century.

### **Archeological Sites**

There are areas in the city that may contain sites of archeological interest, especially within the lands adjacent to the Chattahoochee River. There may be ferry sites, remnants of bridge locations, or other archaeological sites of interest along the river. However, there is no comprehensive survey of existing confirmed or potential archaeological sites in Sandy Springs.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **1. Consideration of a Local Historic Preservation Ordinance**

Sandy Springs continues to experience tremendous growth and development pressures. If the city wishes to retain its historic resources, it is vital that the City of Sandy Springs take steps to adopt a local preservation ordinance that will provide measures to identify, preserve and protect remaining historic buildings and sites in the community. Significant actions that should be considered once a local ordinance is adopted is the establishment of a Historic Preservation Commission and the creation of a Local Historic Landmark or Local Historic District program that could provide some protection for individual and grouped historic resources in Sandy Springs. Properties that were identified in the 1996 survey as eligible or potentially eligible for the National Register should be included in designations for any local historic landmark program.

### **2. Update of the Historic Resource Survey**

The existing historic resource survey for Sandy Springs, while an invaluable resource for beginning a local historic preservation program in the city, will need to be updated to incorporate those historic resources that have become historic within the last ten years. The rule of thumb for judging whether or not a building or site is historic is if it has reached an age of 50 years old. Using that measure, a future historic resource survey would need to consider all buildings constructed in Sandy Springs within the past 50 years. Some of the resources that will need to be assessed include the large numbers of suburban homes constructed during the 1950s and into the 1960s, such as Side-Gabled Cottages and Ranch houses. One example of an area that should be surveyed is the neighborhood of Mt. Vernon Woods, laid out in 1953.

Due to the pressures of urban development and redevelopment in Sandy Springs, it is likely that some of the identified resources in 1996 have since been demolished. Therefore, an updated survey would give a more accurate reflection of the status of historic resources in the community. There is state funding for conducting surveys that may be available through the Georgia Historic Preservation Division (HPD).

### **3. National Register of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places provides honorable recognition to historic properties that demonstrate a certain level of historic, architectural or other significance. There are many properties in Sandy Springs that are eligible for the National Register; owners should be educated about the benefits of listing their properties on the National Register. There may also potentially eligible districts within Sandy Springs, such as Poletown. Additional research will be

needed to determine if a district would be likely in this area, or within other areas in Sandy Springs.

The National Register provides some protection from Federal and State undertakings, such as road projects, as well as offers some financial incentives for certain properties.

#### **4. Vacant Historic Buildings**

There are a number of vacant historic buildings and properties in Sandy Springs that are vulnerable to demolition for lack of an advocate. Historic preservation efforts should focus on the preservation and reuse of vacant properties by creating preservation plans to protect these buildings. Working with owners and determining the needs of people and their buildings, it is possible to search for a suitable renter or buyer for the property through the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation Revolving Fund Program. Part of this planning process should be educating owners about the possible benefits of maintaining historic buildings.

#### **5. Public Education**

Ongoing public education of local citizens and developers about the history of Sandy Springs and the benefits of historic buildings is vital to continuing preservation efforts in the city. People must be taught the fundamentals of historic preservation and the benefits involved. Information regarding federal, state and local financial incentives, programs and other technical assistance need to be disseminated within the community.

#### **6. Heritage Tourism**

Tourism can be one of the most visible benefits of an effective historic preservation program. Heritage tourism provides an economic development incentive for preservation and is worthy of consideration as a major initiative in Sandy Springs. There are already programs administered by Heritage Sandy Springs that provide a model for heritage tourism, such as the Driving Tour of Sandy Springs. Such a tour should be updated on a regular basis to remove those resources that have been demolished. Perhaps a brochure of those resources that have been demolished would provide an incentive for local action toward a local historic preservation ordinance.

### **REFERENCES**

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